


By the forgetful waters they forget not thee O. Ins. Paul.

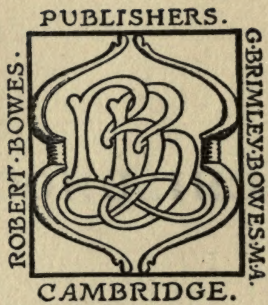
Alfred de Burgh

A.S. Carter



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A CHILDHOOD

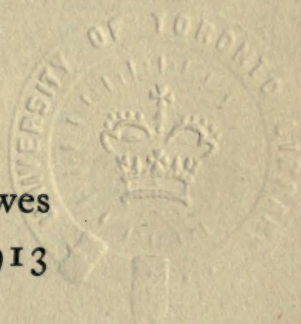


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A CHILDHOOD
BY JOAN ARDEN

WITH A PREFACE BY
PROF. GILBERT MURRAY

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PREFACE

I DO not know the author of this book, and I have, as a rule, a strong feeling against books that tell no continuous story. Yet it has interested me greatly, both because of the skill and faithfulness with which the scattered memories are recorded, and because it somehow reads like the proem to something sterner and sadder. Memories of childhood draw most of their magic from some incompleteness of this sort. They seem like the random play of eddies in a wide river that will hereafter gather to a cataract, significant because greater things are coming, and pathetic because they give no sign what those greater things will be. The randomness of childhood is well represented here; also its sense of a mysterious life in lifeless things, its terrors and its heartlessness; and the eternal mockery of the poor "grown-ups" in the background, vexing their hearts with love and care for the children, and succeeding only in becoming a well-recognized nuisance, useful as a protection against still greater calamities, though always checking and marring the current of true life.

Preface

Weak, random, heartless, full of fears, surrounded by unknown forces, childhood has on its side the one talisman of fresh and undimmed vitality ; and this book seems to stop very suitably at the first dawn of later life, the first entry of the lassitude born of experience: "I felt somehow annoyed because I thought I was expected to look back, and though I looked, what did it matter?"

GILBERT MURRAY.

TO MY FATHER AND MOTHER

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I

SUMMER AND WINTER

SUDDENLY there would come a day in the early spring when the sun shone hot on my back, and I found the first celandines half under the trees. I remember the shining yellow—more brilliant than any yellow which followed—of the petals, and the juicy snap of the stalks as I picked the celandines.

Down among the long wet grass there was a trickle of a stream which only ran after heavy rain, as it was an overflow from the drive gutter. It poured out in a little dribble of water from a drain-pipe into a pool, and then wandered off through winding banks till it fell gently into a bigger pool—too big ever to be filled, and the water only made it muddy in patches and then lost itself in the grass. In summer the pool was caked dry, and had cracks in it, as if there had been an earthquake. There my brother Bertrand and I used to play, damming the stream with mud, and then making a gap and letting the stopped-up water rush through with fury. When I put my face on the grass the stream looked

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as if it were the size of a big river, with cliff-like banks and a rough green forest hanging over the edges.

I used to come back here and play alone and feel the coldness of the water, which numbed my fingers, and the friendly coolness of the wet mud ; and I used to think how wonderful the big pool would look if it were full, but there was never enough water.

There was a broad walk running by the churchyard, with rows of lime trees on each side. The trees were strong and straight, and knobs grew out of the trunks. Through the railings I could see the grave-stones, and if I could linger behind long enough I could read the names on them. There was one old brown grave, sometimes nearly hidden by the long grass, at which I used to stare with admiration, for I had been told that a soldier who had won the V.C. was buried there. At the end of the walk nearest the town there were iron gates with stone pillars in between, and stone skulls supporting the pinnacles on the top. I thought these grinning heads strange and amusing, but never connected them with living people or a churchyard.

There was a sandy road leading to a wood, but

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we had to go through a strange part of the town to reach it, over the stone bridge, where on one side the houses grew out of the still, muddy water, and further on where there was a wide street with cobble stones edging the pavement, and little crowded houses far across near the water, looking like some queer old picture, and I wished to get out of their sight. There was a blacksmith's shop, too, lower than the pavement, so that I could not see in clearly, and could only smell the burning hooves, which seemed to me to make the worst smell in the world, and hear the wicked ring of metal. I did not like to show that I was frightened, but I held my breath and tugged at the hand of whoever was with me to make her walk faster.

Before we came to the wood there was a big beech tree, and if you stood in the ditch by it and called, you heard a sound answer you—as if a spirit lay in that distant valley and laughed shrilly at you, repeating itself brokenly as its voice grew less and less.

The wood was full of fir trees, which grew so thickly that the distance underneath them was dark and fearful. Nothing grew in their shade, and even their lower branches were dead, so that I was glad to know that a grown-up person was walking calmly along the cart-track.

The light grew brighter when we had been a

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long way, and the dark wood gave way to a space of friendly beeches and oaks, and then opened on to a moorland hill covered with thin slippery turf and streaks of heather; and we sat on the top, where the wind was always singing.

Another way, along a winding lane with high hedges, which always seemed muddy, led us out suddenly between two duck-ponds which bit into the road, so that when it had been raining we had to jump across the water connecting them, and then we had only to climb a bank and there was a long stretch of hillocks and little pools. A happy wildness filled me when my feet touched the short grass, and I ran up and down the mounds and jumped the pools where they were narrow enough. This common gently rose up-hill, and a little away from it there was a disused slate quarry. I had never been farther than this, and it seemed to me the strangest place I knew. It seemed as if something I did not understand lay in the air about that deserted ravine, where trees hung over the far side above the dry bed of a stream. I used to slither down the near side, the loose bits of slate slipping down in shoals from wherever my feet tried to get a hold, making a soft tinkling noise as they fell among the boulders at the bottom. Then I could walk down the river-bed in the quiet darkness, where the water had left little paths on the sand to

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show where it had once flowed ; and when I was called to go home, there was the desperate adventure of climbing up the steep bank, where my footing crumbled away as if I was treading on cotton wool in a dream, and the triumph of sitting at last on the turf in the bright light at the top, holding in my hands bits of slate which I should use to draw on when I got home.

Behind the house a field-path sloped down, sometimes so steeply that I had to run, to the flat grass fields of the valley and the brook. The brook was narrow and happy, and there were no fears in the shallow brown water. I have seen water-rats there, and heard them plop into the water as they slipped away. Also there was a mysterious headland, with coarse sandy grass on it, which sometimes after heavy rain was quite hidden by the swirling water. For Bertrand and me it was always a new excitement on our walks to race to see if the island was there. When it had risen up like a sponge we could walk on it, and sail boats in the rapid channel, which was all that was left of the brook.

The brook joined a river, and we used to cut across a field by a hollow old elm tree and come to the left river-bank. The water flowed past quickly, with waves like the sea sometimes,

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and with a continual happy singing as it glinted over the stones. It was shallow in places, but anywhere you could see the bottom, it was so clear. There was a shelving bit of shore with big boulders, which we called the sea-side, and where we used to build piers. In one place the water had grown into a deep green pool, and the bare reddish branches of a tree could just be seen reflected in it. My sister Judith told me that a whole tree was growing under water here, but I dared not look long at that deathly pool because it wanted to drown me too.

It was in the fields here, flat but with grassy ridges, that Dick used to come and look for plovers' eggs. He used to leave me at a gap in the hedge to tell him if anyone came, for he was trespassing. I remember the gray spring evenings, with the peewits crying despairingly and flying in great circles above us, and the terror which filled all my bones that we should be caught. We never were caught, and there was great happiness when we were safely walking home. Then we had plovers' eggs for tea.

Farther down the river, near the weir and the big gray stone bridge with many arches, there was a bank which rose steeply up a little way from the river-side. It was thinly covered with trees, and here, sheltered in this cold country, grew tufts of primroses in the spring. It was called Birdsgrove ;

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it was not thick enough for a wood, and the ground was covered with short grass, and cold gray tree-stems rose up from it. There was something magical about it and slightly unfriendly, as if it were ground sacred to spirits.

Beyond the kitchen garden, and away from the house, there was a wild bit of wood, chiefly made of big old yew trees. Only a child could stand upright under their dark branches. Looking up one saw nothing but dead twigs and shaling bark. They were bare of all green there. I had been frightened when I was small by being told that these yew trees were so bad that nothing could grow underneath them. And the ground, bare except for the slippery covering of little brown leaves, was a proof of this. I remember a little patch of light between the trees where some nettles grew, and which I dare not pass. But later I found a new land here. I climbed up a stiff unfriendly tree, pressing through the thick mat of branches and the lean twigs, which whipped back on to my face and stung it; then panting, I suddenly came through on to the soft green flatness of the top-side of the branches. That was the new land. I lay on boughs so thick that I could not fall through, and barely see through them; and overhead there was only sky and moving clouds and the swaying

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yew-tree tops. No human being could be heard, only sometimes the twittering and singing of birds, and then a far-off sound of a dinner bell. And in the late summer not even the birds, only the wind whishing through the green.

The friendly hours spent among the trees were so many that they have left one peaceful whole impression in my mind without separate incidents. But I remember also the lower branches of a big oak tree, which I reached by pressing through the vindictive twigs of a little yew tree growing under it. I have lain up there nearly asleep in the hollow between two branches, the thick top of the yew filling everything up underneath. There again I was in a new world without any ground.

On windy days I remember standing on a long springy bough of a yew tree, making myself one with the wildness, and forcing the branch to bend to the earth and letting it spring up while I held on to others with my hands. There was also a little beech tree, which had a bough near the ground spreading out like a fan. I tied string on to four of the outermost twigs, then I stood on the main branch and gathered up the reins of my horses and drove them with fury, as I had seen ancient Britons in a circus drive their teams of horses from a chariot. I bent them to the ground with my feet, and let them spring so that the old

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brown leaves of last summer, which still clung to the twigs, made a rustling noise.

In the late summer evenings, when the dusk comes soon, I remember how excited I got, and how I rushed about the garden. Once a flock of starlings had dropped on to a wood of laurel bushes, which had grown so tall that I could stand underneath and look at their bare wicked branches. As I heard their gurgling, I suddenly remembered a tale in the *Arabian Nights*, where a Vizier had the power of understanding the language of birds and beasts. I threw myself face downwards on the edge of the grass, so that my head was under the laurels, and listened to the gurgling, trying to hear it in words. I lay there long, listening and hoping, but I heard nothing in the birds' voices but the intermittent gurgling. Then, with a sudden frightened whirr of wings, they flew off in a flock to another talking place, and I went in gloomily to bed, with a queer hopeless sense that what I had tried to do was not possible.

On a morning in the early summer I ran out of the hall-door into the sunshine. I did not know that the long grass across the drive was being mown that day, and the fresh smell of it came very suddenly, and stopped me on the door-step with

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a sense of happiness all through me. I stood and watched the mowers, fascinated by the repeated swish of the scythes as the tall grass fell easily from the sharp blades in long curves. Now and then a man would straighten himself, and with one hand holding the scythe by the blade he would clean it with a handful of grass, and use the sharpening-stone which he drew from a leather belt round his waist. Then there was a new and pleasant sound of the scraping ring of the stone on the metal.

There was a patch of long grass near the lawn which William the gardener used to mow himself. There was only enough hay to make one big hay-cock, but it was more friendly to play with than any I knew. On warm, still afternoons we liked to build houses, and then lie in them with the smell of the sun-dried hay all round us. We used to make it ourselves, combing it up with a big wooden rake, and in the evening we used to pile it into a hay-cock, scattering some hay on the ground near, and then climbing to the swaying top of the hay-cock to preach a sermon before we went to bed. We waved our arms, called out, "Caw-ca-daw-ca-daw, Amen," and then flew down like great birds on to the bed below. It was hard to leave and go in, even when the sun had dropped behind the hill, and a smell of damp crept over the garden with the dusk.

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I once saw something white on a hedge which crept down by the field at the bottom of the garden. Iron railings ran alongside the hedge a little way and pressed against it, and then ended abruptly. So I had to squeeze between them, pricking my hands with the thorns. Suddenly I saw the great white bells of a convolvulus, whose thin stems trimmed with green leaves straggled over the hedge, lying calmly on it. This filled me with such awe that I quickly picked one or two and ran away.

I liked to lie on the lawn on still summer days and watch the swifts as they raced screaming far above me round the house. Then they would suddenly wheel away from the house and scatter into the distance, and the pleasant sound of the screaming would die. I used to follow them with my eyes till they were only specks in the sky, and then even the specks faded into the blue.

One hot day in late summer a big party of us used to drive a long way through the low green country, up rough roads which were hot and glaring in the sunshine, and where, as it grew more hilly, there were no hedges, but stone walls. At last we came to a little low gray hotel at the beginning of a dale, a place where the river flowed for some distance between two steeply-wooded banks. The

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horses stopped here, and we ran on, over exhilarating short turf down to the lively river. For some time as we went there was a stretch of broad grass, where one could hire sad-looking donkeys to take one up the dale. Then sometimes the path would become narrow and rocky and nearly touch the river, and all the time there was the weight of the great hills above, and sharp gray rocks standing out suddenly like the bones of a monster showing through its skin of turf. There were strange dark caves high above the water which I dared not enter. I liked to climb up the steep hill-sides, covered with thin grass and pale purple scabious, where I suddenly saw bare ribs of the gray rock, rising above the turf, warm in the sun. The little trees were thick with the green of late summer, and birds whose notes I did not know called from the other bank where there were more woods, and no unfavoured people were allowed to go.

We came back to the hotel for tea, and saw peaceful, fat old gentlemen in knickerbockers wandering about the garden or reading newspapers; they stayed here for the fishing. But what seemed to me the most interesting thing in that little gravelled space by the windows was a stone mounting-block, up whose steps I was continually running to mount imaginary horses.

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When we were going home later in the fading sunshine, William would let me hold the reins when we went uphill, while he walked ; and sitting on the box driving while the horses walked, or keeping time with my feet while they trotted, I was quite happy.

I never saw these hills in the winter, when the cold mists and snow were among them, for it was too far to walk, so I only knew the nearer country when everything was frozen. We walked a long way once along a road, where there were puddles of white ice to smash through, to a pond, where my bigger brothers skated and where I slid. Then came the long walk home, and when I was tired I rode on Dick's shoulders, my hands clasping his warm dark head. But later, when I too skated, I remember the happiness of the grinding noise of the skates as they bit into the ice and you slid along. Sometimes I would hear a "Look out!" behind me, which meant that I must stiffen my elbows and put my feet together, and the same dark-headed brother would come behind and push me, his hands under my elbows, so fast that I could not think, and I could only hear the whirring noise of our skates and feel the delightful warmth in my fingers and the cold air on my cheek as we swished past the banks.

Once when we were walking home carrying our

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skates, there was a biting wind ; we passed through a gate, on one side of which was a stone wall which rose above my head ; and there was sudden peace from the wind.

Now and then, when I was still quite young, I was allowed to go to church on dark Sunday evenings. I remember very clearly that once my mother and I waited at the end of the service while the organ was played. The sounds seemed to rise into the heights of the tower square. The people were streaming out, and the night wind through the open doors made the yellow gas-jets flare. Then a dark-bearded sexton went round, turning out all but a few of the lights, till the church was dim. The chancel, which had been blazing with light, was now only lit by the distant half-turned-down gas. Still the music went on, and I heard the chink of money being counted in the vestry. Then my father, who was the clergyman, strode slowly across the square under the tower towards us, his head thrown back as if he was looking at the sounds of the music, which I thought chased one another about near the roof. He sat at the end of our pew, his face quiet with thinking, till it was over. Then our feet made a clattering noise on the pavement of the great empty church, and we went home up the field-path in the dark windy night.

II

GARDENERS

I USED to stand for a long time watching William dig. Neither of us spoke more than a few words; but there was a restful companionship as I silently sharpened sticks, and watched the regular movements of the spade as it slid into the brown soil and tossed it up fresh and crumbling.

Sometimes there were worms in the fresh earth. These I pounced on and put together in a moving heap where they would not be touched, and when William had finished his work, had driven the spade straight into the ground and scraped his big boots on it, he would gather up the living worms as if they were dead strings, and we would both walk down to the rough grass bank where the chickens lived. Then he would pull the worms into little bits and throw them down. The chickens would run for them greedily. One would seize a worm and run for its life till it thought it could eat unseen, and would gobble till some of the other chickens found it, and then the race would begin again.

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On summer afternoons, when I had quickly escaped from my dinner and was coming up the steps into the kitchen garden, William, on his way to work, would call out, "Comin' to 'elp me, Baby?" and, if there was nothing more interesting to do among the trees, I went.

When I was eleven years old I drove through London for the first time on a journey. When I came back I described London to William. All I remember of the description is throwing out my arms and saying, "There are lots and lots of railway lines, more than you can see, all going to London, and then there are miles and miles of houses." William would nod his head quickly sideways, a mark of interest, never ceasing his work, which in this case was digging and levelling a bit of waste ground a few yards square. When I had finished, he paused, pulled himself straight up, resting one hand on the spade-handle and said: "I dessay, Baby, in this 'ere Lunnon this bit of ground here 'd be worth a 'underd pounds."

When I was going out to tea with other children I remember coming into the garden and calling William to take me. He left his work, came down to the yard, pumped a great spurt of the shining water, and put his head and neck underneath. I stood near and watched, fascinated by the glistening drops of water on his red neck and on his red-

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dish moustache when he stood up. Then he would put on a collar, which hung all his work-time on a nail in the shed where he cleaned the boots, put on a coat, and take my hand. He would walk along at a never-changing quick pace, and I had to half run to keep up.

When I was passing along the yard and saw William in his shed sitting on the bench in washed-out purple socks, changing his thick boots for thin black rubber shoes, I knew that one of my great pleasures was coming. He was going to take out the machine to mow the long sloping lawn in front of the house. He would tie a rope to the iron part in front of the grass-box, and then I became a horse, and pulled with delight. He treated me as a horse, making noises in his mouth when he wanted me to go on, and calling "Woa," when I was to stop. And I remember shaking my short mane of hair over my eyes impatiently when I had to stand still, because some part of the machinery had to be overhauled. Then I would pull hard up the hill and break into a trot on the flat and have to be checked.

In the summer I was often out before breakfast, when all the world smelt fresh and happy, helping William to take away the bits of wood from the fronts of the coops, and seeing the chickens all come fluttering out. Then I took away the shutter

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from the big fowls' house, and climbed on to the railing to see the result when William unlocked the inner door. The fowls came pouring out like a torrent, jostling each other through the little door which would only allow one at a time to pass through. The force behind each fowl was so great that it was impelled some distance away from the food trough which stood at the side, and it had to rush back to eat. I chuckled to see the big cock forget all his dignity, and jostle like the rest until he had gobbled a bit, and then all his calmness would come back and he stood poised on one leg and carefully looked round.

The excitement soon died away, and the hens wandered solemnly off, pecking as they went. But I had thought of this, and had brought a handful of corn with me in spite of his gruff "Na—a, Baby," because I spilt it about; so now I caused another excitement by calling to the fowls, throwing down the corn and then seeing them come scrambling wildly across the field.

William and his mother lived in one of the cottages in a steep irregular line which climbed from one street to another at the top of the hill, and which were only connected by uneven stone steps. When we went to see her some of the strange steps were so high that it needed all my small strength to get up them like a grown-up

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person, and I was tired when we came to the flat stone outside her cottage. She was always glad to see us, and told us that we were welcome. She was very little, and had dark, bright eyes, a nose and chin that nearly met, and gray curls hanging down on each side of her face. It was nice to stare at her restless eyes and shining little forehead. I had a fear that she would ask me to eat something off one of her blue-patterned plates; for when I saw one with the remains of her breakfast on it, standing on the glossy oilcloth which covered the table, I did not think it looked clean. It seemed to me it would be a dreadful thing to have to eat in that room, which smelt, as all cottages do, of a curious dryness, as if the sun had sucked out some wickedness from the bits of carpet and curtains, and even the wooden things, like the little chair which she told us that William used to sit on when he was a child. I hardly believed that, since William was a big man now.

If anyone said anything about a certain old sexton who sat near us in church in a black gown, carried a staff, and had a weary, bloodless face and thin tufts of hair, her face would suddenly grow quiet with an intense fury, for she had a fixed idea that this mild old man wished to kill her. She would tell us, shaking her little smooth head, of how she had seen him lurking round a corner of a

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street with a brick in his hand, waiting to murder her.

Then she would go on murmuring to herself whilst we were looking at the photographs of sea-side places and the china ornaments, stuffed squirrels, and boxes covered with sea-shells in the front room; and when I looked at her, her eyes were burning. I was never at all afraid of her, though I was afraid of things which there was less reason to fear. When William came clattering down the steps in his big nailed boots at dinner time, he would knock, come in, hang up his cap, and say, "Well, mother," (the 'o' pronounced as in 'bother') as he sat down suddenly, waiting for his food, and she would say tenderly, "Eh, Willy, by," and that was all.

I was once told that in one of the cottages at the top of the row a poacher lived. I did not like to ask what "poacher" meant, but thought it must be something devilish, especially as I had also heard the man called "Black Harry." I used to go quickly past the cottage door, breathing easily when I was safely out in the road above. I once saw him lazily smoking a pipe as he leant against his door-post, and caught a glimpse of a fire behind. But he looked black and fierce, and that was enough to keep my fear alive.

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Rebecca was our nurse, and seemed to me a very beautiful person. She had smooth hair just streaked with gray, and a face which changed its shape very quickly when she laughed. I afterwards knew consciously that her nose had a lump on the end of it, and her upper lip the beginning of a moustache. When she wanted to say "Yes," but the word would have been untrue, she used to nod and giggle till her whole body shook, and when we, mistaking the spirit for the letter, delightedly called out, "You said 'yes'!" her face would become squeezed up with laughter as she protested that she had not.

Bertrand and I stayed with her once when we were very young at her father's cottage in a far away Leicestershire village. The wicket-gate and the straight path, edged with flowers, which led to the red cottage struck me vividly. We had dinner as soon as we arrived in the cottage kitchen. The knives and forks had black handles; I had never seen handles like that before, and this fact, combined with the terrifying sight of Rebecca's father, a fat old man with a white frill of hair round his face, a shaved upper lip, and rigid ways, and who made me think of a beetle on its hind legs, so filled me with fear that I could not eat, and in disgrace my dinner was taken away and given to the dog.

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The dog was a very gentle mongrel collie, with long yellow and white hair. On a wet afternoon, when my brother was drawing and not looking at me, I got Jillie to lie on the sofa beside me, and happily began cutting her long hair short with scissors, which made the same pleasant sound as that which grown-up people must have enjoyed when my own hair was being cut short. I had not done much, and was so careful not to hurt the dog that she had gone to sleep and never moved, when Rebecca found me and scolded me angrily. I was puzzled and dumb, and was for some time in a state of gloomy disgrace.

Some time afterwards Rebecca used to tell people of how I cut Jillie's hair, with amusement bubbling over the folds of her face, and I made the discovery that the same thing which was naughty at one time became amusing to grown-up people a little later. Then I understood that Judith's doings, of which Rebecca used to tell us with such pleasure, were really naughty once. It gave a new zest to climbing on to the gable of the roof, holding on to Judith's foot as she crept in front, and being told how naughty it was, and to come down at once, for I knew it would soon turn into something wonderful.

I remember one walk beyond the village—a little path through long grass which led to a rail-

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way bridge, where we could watch the swift trains pass underneath us and be hidden for a moment in the smoke.

One adventure we had there, when a party of school children attacked us. That there was a bridge which Bertrand held against them all, I seem to remember, but I do not know if it is true. I chiefly remember that Bertrand sent me off for help, yelling after me to be quick, and I ran desperately with my head down, nearly blind with tears of fear, and thinking that Bertrand would be killed at least.

Rebecca's father was a gardener, and later when Rebecca left us she married a gardener, which I thought very wonderful. The husband was tall and spare, with very gentle manners, and the usual gardener's frill of hair round his face and shaven upper lip. He was head gardener at a big house outside the county town. Rebecca and her husband lived in a cottage in the grounds, where Bertrand and I once went to see them ; and Rebecca, bustling with happiness, gave us dinner, and kindness shone all over her as she laughed at Bertrand's jokes. Her husband stalked in, his quiet face slowly smiling at a thing which Rebecca found extraordinarily funny.

The children of the big house found out that we were there, and asked us to play with them in

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their garden. When we were coming away, Bertrand overheard one of them say, "Well, they are nice children!" It filled me with a warm sense of happiness; it was partly the goodness of my brother in telling me, but chiefly the fact that part of that praise belonged to me, for they had said "children" and not "boy."

III

ANIMALS

WHEN I was a child I had a great love of horses, but there was little to spend that love on. There were occasional bursts of pleasure when William would lift Bertrand and me in turn on to the great cart-horses used for pulling the loads of coal up the hill to our house. I remember the glow of pride I felt when I was on that swaying horse's back above all the world, trying, when we were going down-hill, not to hold on to the horns which sprout from a cart-horse's collar.

Once a year there was the long drive in a waggonette, when I sat on the box for half the distance, and was allowed by William to drive up the steep hills; but for the other half the seat had to be given up, with sulky discontent, to Bertrand.

Once, Dick, who was learning to ride, brought his horse into the garden and gave us all rides. Then my pride was greater than when I was on the cart-horse. To be astride that big white horse, my bare legs against the warm saddle leather, and my hands sternly kept from clutching the mane except at dangerous moments, seemed to me the greatest happiness possible.

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Though I had no real horses I kept a stable full of imaginary fiery chargers in a wood-shed. It was some distress to me that the door into the yard was not wide enough for a cart, so I decided only to keep riding-horses. One had to step over a step into the wood-shed, and I remember how carefully I used to lead a horse over here when I took one back to its stable.

In a stone wall near the yard was an iron ring, really meant to be used for tying up a waiting horse. It gave me a thrill of pleasure when I found this ring. I used to tie up my horse with a bit of string; then some time after come strolling back with an unseen companion, smacking my legs with a stick as I had seen real men do. Then I remember saying, "Wait a bit while I get my horse." Then I would untie it and ride off on it, finding it had become more fiery than ever, and almost unmanageable through waiting.

But I also knew some real horses. There was a field running alongside the garden and separated by red iron railings. It was let to a corn merchant in the town, who turned his horses out there. I used to feed them through the railings on grass picked from the edges of the mown lawns, and the horses seemed to think it was better than the field grass. There was a brown unbroken horse towards which I felt particular affection. He was tame to

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me, and one day when I was in the field with him I took hold of his fore-lock and found that then he would follow wherever I gently led him. Half frightened and half proud of the power, I used to lead him about when I was sure no one was looking ; and yet, on summer evenings when I was supposed to be in bed, I would sit on the high window-sill in the dusk and watch the men who wanted to break him trying for a long time even to come near him. In the end, however, they always did catch him, and I used to watch their rough breaking lessons with a kind of fascination. I remember one fearful day, hot and sunny, which made it worse, when he was left all day with a bridle on, and the side reins strapped so tightly to a roller round his body that his chin was continually on his chest. He moved about all the time I saw him, his eyes blood-shot, maddened like a bull, and the foam flecking from his mouth. I picked him grass, but he could not grasp much with his upper lip, and the wind blew away the bits.

There was a stone wall on each side of the drive gate ; on the road side there was a drop, but the garden bank met it high up on the other side, so that I could easily sit astride the rounded top and think it was a horse ; the stone pinnacle was its head and neck which I used to pat ; the rough,

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sun-warmed feeling of the stone under my hand was a pleasure.

When I heard footsteps on the road—you could hear before you saw, as a jutting out hedge hid the gate—I used to slip down to the bank and hide there till the steps had passed for fear a stranger should speak to me.

There was a housemaid called Maria, who used to take me for walks sometimes to see her mother who lived in a cottage near. Her mother had a thin brown face, black hair and quick, dark eyes. I was told that she had such a bad temper that her husband would not live with her; but she had many cats, so I liked going there. There was a kindly tabby cat with white on her face and paws, called Tiger, who was the mother of many families, and a quite black one called Blackie, and many children and grandchildren were born and grew up. Whenever we came to the cottage Maria went in and talked, but I played with whichever was then the kitten among the straggling gooseberry bushes and cabbage plants; and when we went home Maria's mother used to give me pale pink roses, which she called "Maiden's Blush," that grew by the window.

We had no cats at home, but one summer someone suggested that one should be hired and have a string tied to a collar round its neck, and

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the other end tied to a ring which ran on a long wire down the kitchen garden path, to scare away the birds from the fruit. So Tiger and a frisky gray kitten called Punch came and lived in a wooden house in the middle of the run, and every morning I had the happiness of carrying up milk in a jug and pouring it into their saucer; then I sat on their box cuddling Punch and watching Tiger as she crouched down, her body soft and pear-shaped, with her legs sunk into it so that only the tips of her front paws could be seen, and hearing the little click of her tongue as she lapped up the milk. I tried to lap my own milk out of a saucer when I was having supper alone and no one was looking, and I could not understand why it was not successful in my case. If I left the milk in the jug for a minute Tiger would look into the neck of it, and finding it too narrow for her head, she would dip her paw in, pull it out, and lick the cream off. I had seen a picture in a book of a cat doing this, with a ribbon round its neck, and printed underneath, "Clever Pussy"; but I thought this very unlikely, so when it really happened I ran excitedly to tell my mother how wonderfully clever Tiger was.

I called Maria "Blackie" and myself "Punch," and when I first went away I wrote letters to "My dear Blackie," anxiously asking for news of the cats, from "your loving Punch."

A CHILDHOOD

Since the time when I was about five, and someone gave me an indiarubber horse, I had a growing family of stuffed animals. It seemed to me necessary that each animal should go into a church once in its life. This was easy with regard to the small ones, which could go in one's pocket, but it worried me that some of the bigger ones were still unregenerate.

One sunny day my father met me in the garden and asked me if I would like to come down to the church with him, while he looked after the men who were working at the restoration. I thought, "Now I can take Poodle," and happily went down the hill holding my father's hand, the wooden dog, covered with stiff curly hair, under my other arm.

Then I stole about the great empty church, where my footsteps sounded like those of many men, and there were surplices looking like ghosts in the passage near the vestry, and I could find out how the organist climbed up to his organ, and there was no one to look at Poodle. It was cool and quiet here after the sun on the path outside and the noises of the birds, so that I felt more solemn, though more free, than on Sundays, when the church was full of living people and I had my best clothes on.

Once a child I knew named Rose Burgoyne persuaded me to let her have one of my animals, a

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white rabbit, to stay the night with her. She treated him like a human being and gave him a bath, but, though covered with fur, his body was hollow and made of plaster. I went to see her next day, and she brought me a lump of damp plaster wrapped in a handkerchief. That was all that was left of my rabbit! To make matters worse, she did not realize what a dreadful thing she had done, and only enjoyed the fine funeral we gave him. We put him in a candle-box, covered with scented leaves out of the green-house, and buried him in my garden, and I said prayers over him. But in the silence of that night, when I was in bed and all the other animals were with me, there came a terrible feeling of the hole in my heart that that rabbit had left, and I cried bitterly. I determined that whatever he were to look like, I would dig him up the next day and hug him. When the next day came I did not dig him up for fear of what the worms might already have done.

Rose had dolls, and she wished my animals to behave like boy-dolls, which they did not do, naturally. She once brought her doll dressed in white and with a veil as a bride, and wished my squirrel to marry her. I unwillingly allowed it to happen, with a rabbit as best man and myself as guest. But as soon as she had gone I hastily had another service and un-married the squirrel.

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Among all my animals there was one whom I loved most, though I tried not to let the others see, and that was the squirrel. He had brilliant red eyes and was covered with sandy fur. After I had had him for some years Bertrand was playing with him when he fell on his front and squeaked. This sudden voice filled us with awe and we examined him carefully. We found that by pressing his body in front of his left leg he squeaked. It was much more wonderful that he should suddenly squeak after some years than if he had done it when he was new. My toboggan was painted a bright red-brown so that it should look like a squirrel and remind me of him.

Once some people were calling, and I was gloomily in the room among the others. Then someone began to talk to me, and told me how she had once climbed a tree where she had been told there was a squirrel's nest, and put her hand inside it and felt some young squirrels. As she spoke, all my shyness dropped away and I listened eagerly, surprised that any grown-up person could be so interesting.

One day in the early summer my mother drove a long way to see an old man, and while she talked to him I and another child ran freely over the garden. It seemed to me the most beautiful

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garden that I had ever seen, for there were rabbit-holes in the big sloping lawn, and rabbits were next to squirrels in my heart. There were also said to be squirrels, and at tea-time we sat near the open window where there was a basket of nuts. Soon a squirrel came in through the window timidly, with quick wonderful movements. He took a nut, and it flew round in his lithe fingers as he sawed off the top with his teeth, and the bits of shell were scattered on the carpet as if they were thrown off by a whirring wheel. I hardly dared breathe for fear of disturbing him, and whenever I spoke of the incident afterwards my throat felt full and rough with emotion. There were azaleas about the garden, and the smell of one brings all that scene back.

There was another world of animals whose life was quite unknown to the furry ones. Bertrand and I were not relations to these families of small china animals, but we both had a great number of them. Judith had some too, but she would only keep those which she thought beautiful and were quite unbroken. The broken ones she gave to me. Bertrand had the most, and he did not throw out the slightly-injured ones. I never could understand why I always wanted his animals, more particularly as soon as they joined his collection.

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Judith and Bertrand had each got a beautiful gray china elephant, bigger than all the other animals, with a kind and lordly head, a brown streak down his back, and pink at the end of his curled-up trunk. They each cost three-and-sixpence, so it was hopeless to expect one yet. But one day Bertrand's one was swept off a table and broken into little bits, and he was given another to comfort him. I could not see that it was fair that he should have a broken one and a whole one, while I had none. Even when later Judith broke the trunk of hers and gave it to me, it was not so good as a new one, or even one that I had broken myself.

These animals never went out of doors, except occasionally to church in our pockets to enliven an afternoon service ; but Bertrand and I played an endless game with them on the nursery table. We built houses for each family out of a few bricks and bits of wood ; there were regiments of British soldiers in barracks in the town to guard them, and a railway ran over a bridge to another land—the window-sill. Once there was an earthquake when this bridge was crowded with people, and many animals had to lie on their backs in a hospital while their legs were cemented on. All the space round the table was the sea ; boats would come alongside, take up some adventurous animals and go exploring. After many dangers, and with the

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animals toppling about the bottom of the boat owing to the swinging motion, they would be stranded on a distant bit of land—the chest of drawers against the wall. The streets were given names, and we drew plans of the towns. All this had to be swept into boxes when the nursery was cleaned, but it grew up again.

Yet another world of a lower order was formed by the more life-like of the animals made of chocolate or sugar, or something of that sort. When we were very small my mother used sometimes to give us sugar rabbits, which she kept in a mysterious store-room big enough to stand in, and which I thought would always, whatever happened, be full of biscuit boxes and the smell of ginger. I was anxious to eat the sugar rabbit, and yet torn with sorrow that it must die. The same thing happened about anything friendly, like a pear or cherries. I always ended by eating it, but badly needed some way of making its fate more bearable for me. So I thought to myself that what really happened was that, after being chewed up and slipping down my throat, the rabbit came together again and found himself in a beautifully-furnished room inside me and lounged on a velvet-covered sofa. This gave me a sudden happiness, because eating nice things would no longer give them pain.

IV

THE DARK

WHEN we were quite young Bertrand and I used to tell each other stories every night when we were in bed and all was dark and still. They were generally stories about the adventures of animals—no love-interest was allowed—and on the nights when it was my turn to tell one I used to get sleepy before the end, and, hoping that he too was sleepy, my story would gradually drop off in the middle of a sentence. “Go on,” came vigorously from the other bed. “They all lived happily ever after; I’m going to sleep now,” I would reply.

Those were generally peaceful nights, but once I woke up in the night and heard a step outside, and the ring of the metal end of a walking stick on the gravel. I breathed out, “Bertrand, are you awake?” and at the same time he asked if I was awake. We had both heard the same noise, and it became more fearful for that reason.

When I was left alone strange things would happen in the dark. Once I heard the gravel crunching under the wheels of a carriage that drove furiously up to the front door, and then the grating of the bell as it was pulled, and then—silence.

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There was something strange that lived especially in the darkness of the stairs. When I was sent from the dining-room to fetch something from upstairs, the Thing would let me go up safely, but when I began to come down it came behind me. I rushed down, but the faster I ran the closer it came, till I heard the whirring of something near my ears and the feel of something near my throat. Then I threw myself against the dining-room door and opened it. The room was full of light and peace, and no one knew in there of the terror outside, and I shut the door quietly behind me.

Even worse than the terrors on the stairs were the terrors which lurked in dark corners outside the house. There were sudden sharp corners and yard doors, and a narrow place between two walls. I once asked myself if, by running round the house at night I could save my father's and mother's lives, would I do it? and I decided that I could not.

Another dreadful thing was to hear the rain falling insistently at night when I was alone in bed. It once poured down with a growing swell of noise, and I called out to a nurse-maid who was passing the door, "The rain will come over the house and we shall be drowned!" She came up to my bed and said, "It's all right, God promised never to drown the world again, and when the rain's loudest, it soon gets gentle again." And

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with a great peace I could listen boldly to the dreaded rain and hear it getting gentler and gentler just as she had said, and I dropped asleep to the faint dripping from the full gutters.

I would wake up sometimes quaking with fright, and unable to realize that I had got back into ordinary life again, until some known bits of furniture and the shape of the walls would loom clear, and the horror was safely behind me. I cannot remember many of these bad dreams, but there was one that kept coming back. I stood at the top of the bare back-stairs, and people pushed me so violently that I fell downstairs. There was a fearful feeling in my throat that I had no longer any hold on the earth, and that I must be smashed against the wall at the bottom of the stairs, when suddenly I was floating calmly down. But as soon as I touched the ground at the end of the stairs I was up at the top; and the same thing happened again with the same fright, though I knew that I should fly instead of falling when I was pushed down.

There were dreams too of being madly chased, and there were times of great noise and fear, when I shouted with all my might, and felt as if I should burst the world, and just when everything was on the edge of horror I found myself lying in my bed, dazed but still, and the end of my bed was firm

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to look at and the room was quiet. But I always remembered from that time that I could shout myself out of a bad dream when it became unbearable. I was ashamed to tell anybody about these horrors, so when a grown-up sister was once sleeping in the same room, and I woke up in a fright, I said timidly, "May I come into your bed? I've got a sore throat."

One dream left a great fear behind it which followed me into my waking life—the fear of being drowned. I dreamt that I boldly said I would walk to the river and drink out of it on a Sunday, though I had been warned that something dreadful would happen if I did. I went and lay on my face and drank the cold water in my hot curved hand. But at once the arms of the Devil dragged me under the water, and he swam with me, holding me very closely and firmly so that I saw his horrid face, black and gleaming with wicked pleasure, with a bent nose and pointed ears and sprouting horns. I woke just when it seemed impossible to draw another gasping breath.

It was not till many years later that the bad dreams left me, and I had such beautiful ones that I used to try to keep my mind still in the dream-state when I felt the clearness of everyday steadily coming over me.

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The words of prayers and hymns generally passed through my head without being understood, or meaning something different and often absurd, but there was one prayer that we used every evening, whose words came hot from my heart: "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night," and I felt that it acted partly as a charm, and that I could not possibly be safe unless I had said it. There were also some lines of a hymn which was sometimes sung in church:

O may no evil thing draw near,
To do us harm or cause us fear . . .

I sang them fervently, for they seemed to be more important when they were sung by many people than when they were said by one.

I remember one day when I was about five or six I was given some sewing. I was left all alone to do it in a big room. The needle came unthreaded, and I could not thread it again though I tried for a long time. Then in annoyance I stamped round the table. Suddenly I said, "God, you are a fool." The words came out with a rush, and it felt as if something inside me had spoken which was not really myself at all—for I was a religious and obedient child, and I had never even

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called a human being a fool. As suddenly as the words had come out I felt bitter sorrow for them, and I remember praying at once that they might be forgiven. But next time I went to church, when I heard the commandment, "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain," I felt certain that I had now broken that commandment, and I saw that the Lord would never forgive me. After that, whenever I went to church and heard the Third Commandment, I knew it was being read especially for me, and at other times too my sin kept coming back to me.

One night lying awake I was so tortured with the idea, that I called out to Bertrand who was sleeping in the same room, "Bertrand, if someone takes the name of the Lord in vain, will he ever be forgiven?" "No," said Bertrand briskly and cheerfully. After that I was quite sure that there was no hope for me. But I gradually grew older and forgot my sin.

There were some months one summer when I found it difficult to sleep, and I came to dread the long silences of the night. I was sent to bed when it was still light, and as it grew colder and darker I tried to think I should go to sleep in a minute; then there would be flickering candle lights

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through the half-open door, the creaking of bare wooden stairs under heavy feet as the servants went up to bed, and the house was quieter.

There was a long space of silence; then my mother came quietly up and into my room, surprised to find me awake. I would tell her I was just going to sleep and was very sleepy. After that it grew worse; there was only one more human sound to wait for—the shutting of the study door, the click of the hall shutters, and then my father's slow footsteps slightly dragging upstairs, and his stride along the passage. After that there was a black silence, only broken by occasional ghostly noises, on hearing which I dared not look or move, and lay there sweating with fright, repeating prayers with no pause at the end, but beginning again at once for fear lest a goblin should slip in between.

I remember that my mother had once said how beautiful the stillness of the night was, and I repeated that to myself again and again when the sharpness of some fright had passed, and I no longer needed to pray. I could feel how big and wonderful the quietness was for a few minutes, but then there would come ghostly noises like wood-chopping under the trees in the back garden, or a step on the gravel, and everything but fear was shattered. When there was wind it was better,

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because the wind-spirits were known and friendly, and they drowned the half-human sounds. Once, in the moonlight, I looked out of the window at the strange, bright gravel path like a river running between the dark lawns. Then I crept quickly back to bed, in fear of what I might see coming out of those sharp black shadows.

Occasionally an excursion train from the sea-side would come back after midnight, and I could hear the sounds of shunting, and rowdy voices singing in faint snatches, as the people went home from the station down the hill. These sounds were a comfort ; but they were swallowed into the stillness very soon, which was like a great dragon eating up all the happy sounds.

Then sometimes as I lay there with my eyes hard shut, the hesitating notes of a bird would sound from the garden, and when I opened my eyes for a moment the cold light of dawn was slipping into the room, and the singing of the birds gradually grew into a great chorus. That was the most hopeless time of all. I feared it, and lay there hot and miserable, for it meant another night had gone, and I could no longer hope to sleep before day came. And yet I was aware of the beauty of that singing in the pale light. I used to drop off to sleep uneasily after that.

V

MY SISTERS

I REMEMBER one summer evening as my father and mother and I were walking on the gravel, Lucy, who had been staying away, came up the drive from the station and I ran to meet her, holding on to one hand and dancing by her side as she came up to greet the others. Then we all sat in the dining-room, and she told my father and mother her adventures, and I climbed on to her knee, and did not listen, as I could not understand enough about grown-up affairs for them to be interesting. I laid my hot face against her cool young cheek; it felt so firm and cool, and slightly downy, like a half-frozen peach, and though I had not got much of her attention, I felt that just then I wanted nothing more.

It was the same sister who taught me my notes on a slate. Whenever anyone played, Bertrand and I used to lie under the piano, where we said it sounded better than if we were in chairs. We used to slide ourselves up and down on a mat over the slippery floor by hauling on the iron bars sup-

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porting the pedals. It was a delirium of enjoyment, —the sliding, combined with the thunder of noise above my head. I thought that by hauling on different bars I could alter the sounds myself. It was after one of these nights that I was asked if I would like to learn to play. I was filled with happiness and began the next day.

I did not care for reading myself, and liked people to tell me stories. It was a vivid pleasure when another grown-up sister used to tell stories of the Greek heroes to Bertrand and me when we were in bed. She once asked me what story I would like to hear again, and I said at once to her horror, "About Theseus and the fir-bender."

I remember little of my eldest sister, rarely at home from College, but once there was a burst of pleasure when she sat on the edge of the big bed, where I lay in the candle-lit room with big shadows on the ceiling, and told me stories from Uncle Remus in the old nigger's voice, and made the sound of the water when Br'er Tarrypin went down the well—'ker-blunkity-blink.'

I liked to draw on odd bits of paper. An old envelope split open made a luxuriously clean place to draw on. My pictures were mostly of the houses I would like to live in, with a railway

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running through the field next to the garden, a good deal imitated from Bertrand's drawings. I would also draw pictures of animals, for I thought it foolish to draw people. Later it was horses I most liked to draw. It never occurred to me to draw directly from an animal, but when I saw a horse in the road I used to notice it and say to myself: "Its mouth is farther back than I thought," and so gradually make my pictures more perfect.

I was drawing one day when Bertrand leant over my shoulder and exclaimed to Judith: "I say, look what Joan is drawing; it's rather good." Judith looked, and said, "Oh *that*—it's the same old profile of a horse she's always drawing," and my thirst for praise had to die quickly, still unsatisfied. But I wondered what "profile" meant.

Another time I had carefully drawn a whole horse and thought it very good. An elder brother saw it, and added lines to the legs, joining them to the outside of the body, so that it looked like a ridiculous card-board horse, instead of the one full of life that I thought I had drawn. That was bitter to bear.

It was always pleasant to look at serious coloured pictures or photographs of animals. Bertrand had a book in which were coloured plates of tropical scenery in which many wild animals lived. I remember a puma with its fierce paws on a

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screaming bird that I used in imagination to try and save, and mongooses creeping after snakes' eggs, or strange toads, and lemurs hiding under leaves or skulking in the black background, or hyaenas howling to a moon in the desert. We used to try who could see the greatest number of animals on any page most quickly. This book was a wonderful place of adventure. Another book, which otherwise had pleasant pictures of lobsters and sea-anemones, had one picture which frightened me to tears ; it was a row of sauce-bottles with faces drawn on them and legs and arms, dancing together and holding hands.

When I was about seven I liked to read over and over again a book about the adventures of a family of acrobatic foxes who had an owl for a nurse. It was meant for quite young children, and I felt ashamed of poring over it when I saw Judith looking at me contemptuously.

There was an idea which did not trouble me in the day-time, but sometimes at night it became painful. It was the idea of one long Sunday in Heaven, when one would be dressed in a white night-gown, with wings and bare feet, and this would go on for ever. I called out one night: "Bertrand, can a thing go on for ever and ever without an end?" and Bertrand answered sleepily,

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"A circle has no end," which was no comfort. But when I told Lucy the same difficulty, she said that perhaps God would make a new world when this one was ended and we were all angels, so that we could look after the new people. The prospect of something to do was a great relief. But one night I felt a great fear of being blown out like a candle.

Judith used to tell me stories of the spirits who lived in the trunks of trees; we called them "Ghosties," and I at least believed firmly in them. I was puffed up with solemn pride when I was invited up the beech-tree to hear stories. Sometimes we first filled our handkerchiefs with fruit out of the kitchen-garden and climbed up with heavy stained bundles. Some of the stories have passed away from memory, but I still remember how deeply I was impressed by hearing that the roots of the yew trees reached down to hell, and that all evergreens were wicked.

Once Judith suggested that I should climb to the top of this big beech-tree. I climbed a little way, but, being quite small then, grew frightened and wanted to come down. Judith said contemptuously, "If you are *afraid*, the beech-tree will throw you down, but if you climb to the top and are not frightened, he will hold you and not

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let you fall." I climbed to the top then with no fear. That evening she whispered to me, "To-night the beech-trees are going to fight the yew-trees," and I added to my prayers, "Pray God, make the beech-trees win." The next morning I eagerly asked my sister what had happened, and hearing that the beech-trees had won, I felt a warm sense of an answered prayer inside me.

Each tree that we knew had a character: the big oak-tree below the lawn ranked above all the other trees in his calm wisdom, but he was not so humanly friendly as the beech-tree among whose branches we used to sit, and whose trunk I used to hug and think that I could feel it breathing. The young maple by the field-railings was a fine-minded young genius.

"Do you know what a genius is?" said Judith once. I replied, "A very clever person." "That's only a very clever person, what's a genius?" "A very, very clever person," I said desperately. But Judith was not satisfied; every time her question was repeated I could only answer by strengthening the 'very clever.' I had a sickening feeling of desperation—we were sitting on the top stand of the greenhouse, where the passion-flowers were trailing about us with their strange enticing smell, and the sun was hot on the roof—till I could run away freely though in disgrace, for the question

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was still unanswered. Still, I felt sure in myself that I knew what a genius was.

Once Judith was telling me vague stories of the devils in hell while I lay on the grass by her side listening. Then in a pause I said thoughtfully, "If I had a baby devil here I would see if the black came off," and then lay there staring, because Judith rushed away in furious disgust at this practical way of treating her shadowy stories.

VI

THE TOWN

NEARLY every week I went for an interesting shopping expedition with my mother. We went to a greengrocer's shop, where the kindly shopman's wife let me go where I liked, so I used to go straight behind the counter and peered into the baskets of vegetables and fruit.

Mrs. Turner would call out to me to go into the kitchen "to see the canary-bird." The canary's cage hung near the ceiling out of the reach of the cats, so that I could hardly see the canary, but there were other animals. There was a great tom-cat with white paws, so ponderous and sleepy that I could hardly move him. I thought his name, "Winnie," sounded exactly like him. There were also several lean and active cats.

Every week the greengrocer used to go to the market at the county town for fresh supplies, and came back with a laden cart. He was a big man and reminded me of a walrus. He had sad stupid eyes like a fish, and a grizzled drooping moustache; he would stand on the step of the shop and call

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"Missus," which implied that he had come back safely. He once showed me some kittens in a dark place behind the shop, full of empty fruit baskets, but I do not think either of us spoke a word.

His wife, who was broad and short-necked and wore a mysterious brooch with "Mizpah" written on it, had one of the kindest faces I have ever seen, and in her old broad plainness I thought her more beautiful than her daughter, who was young and good-looking, according to grown-up ideas.

They always used to give me some fruit, generally grapes, which I took as a right. If Bertrand was at home I used to divide them, with scrupulous exactness, with him. Once I remember sitting on the lawn full of perplexity because I had divided them and there was one over, and it is not easy to divide one grape when one only has one's finger to do it with. After long thought I gave it to my canary.

It was a puzzle to me how the Turners could live, for they simply bought fruit at the county town and sold it again to people like my mother. I never liked to ask for an explanation.

The draper's shop was less interesting. It had a tired atmosphere, which closed round you as you got inside the swinging glass doors. But I liked to wait at the counter while the weary, bald-headed

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shopman measured out ribbon, for once he had given me the blank paper which falls away from the ribbon as it is unwound, and I hoped that he might again, but he never did. It was fun to walk about in the part of the shop where women's clothes were shown, and, when no one was looking, punch the senseless people who stood on one leg with no head and very definite figures.

Once I was exploring behind a counter when I found a door standing a little ajar and pushed it open. Inside there was a little hall with coloured tiles on the floor and the dark mouth of a staircase. It surprised me that shop-people should live in an ordinary way with a hall and staircase, but now I understood where those thin women came from who occasionally appeared like magic from behind the counter, and streamed through the shop and out at the door in a silent, single line. They were the sisters of the shopman and came through the hall.

There was a wonderful shop whose windows were full of glittering, but uninteresting, silver, and inside the floor was tiled so that one's boots made a great noise on it, and there were glass counters into which I could not see unless I climbed on to a high stool. Beyond, there was a toy shop where we spent a long and perplexing time buying lead soldiers and cannons, and where many of my fur

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animals were born. Further on, at the end of an out-door passage, was a china shop. There were all sorts of china vases and ornaments on shelves round the walls and on a stand in the middle, and butter dishes and dessert plates piled on the floor. But all these were of no interest, and we went straight and sat on the floor by a shelf of little cardboard boxes. In each box was a family of china animals—a mother and three children. In the case of mice, which were smaller than elephants or rabbits, there were five children. They seemed to me most beautifully made and coloured, and, whether we had money to spend on them or not, we were allowed to look through the boxes by the soft-footed, gracious woman who kept the shop. Then, if we had no money, we could decide which we most wanted, and if we only had a penny, the families could be split up. One little rabbit cost a penny, and I remember how difficult it was to think out how many little mice we could get for a penny.

There was a house standing on the side of a hill where the sparrows in the tall sycamores, and in the thick ivy which grew over the front door, made more noise than they did anywhere else. I often went up those uneven stone steps into the gloomy little porch and through the dreary hall whose walls

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were covered with paper that pretended to be marble, and which sounded hollow when you slapped them. I came here to play with Rose Burgoyne, and we went up the old black oak staircase, so roughly made that the steps were nearly all of different heights, with the bare wood in the middle worn gray by many foot-steps.

I used to slide down the banisters because the odd stairs were difficult to run down fast, till one day Rose's mother ran out with a scared face and said I must never do that again, because a little boy of her's had once fallen over and been killed. I did not think of disobeying, but I thought it a pity to have to go down the less easy way because of a grown-up person's wishes.

Up at the top was the room where Rose slept and we played with her dolls. The ceiling came close down to the little windows which looked from a great height over the porch and into the tops of the sycamores, so that even on bright days the room was dark. I was always glad to come back to the brightness of my own room.

In the garden on the sunny side of the house it was pleasanter. There was a straight gravel path and a wide border of flowers—big red poppies and purple irises I chiefly remember—and sometimes Rose's mother with her worn, unhappy face, brown hair and faded blue eyes was here, with old

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gloves and a trowel, quietly weeding. But Rose would drag me away. Sometimes we went to the lower part of the garden where it was dark under the trees, and even the weeds had long pale stalks, to a wall overhanging the street, from which we threw the husks of beech-nuts on to the passers-by and then hid. At other times we went up through the door into the kitchen-garden. At the top of the kitchen-garden there was a stable; there were no horses, but the two stalls were fitted up with mangers and hay-racks; I used to open the door reverently thinking what might be there. There were dogs and cats; but they had seen too much of children and were not friendly. I was glad when William came to fetch me, and I ran home by his side, holding his big hand.

Bertrand and I liked to walk to a house which stood up white and friendly among the fields, farther out of the town. The garden was high above the road and was on the level of the top of a high wall, and as the rough terrier barked at us over our heads we said anxiously to each other, "Is there a party?" for we liked to be alone with the children who lived there.

There was a faint smell of sandal-wood all over the house, and a fresh happiness in the rooms—especially in the dining-room with its long windows

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and slippery wooden floor, and the red pattern on the dinner plates. I liked walking up the shallow, thick-carpeted stairs, for I could stride up two steps at a time with little effort, and swim down them head first without bruising my legs against the edges.

In the nursery we sometimes had battles of soldiers on the floor, and—this I thought the finest thing—there was a big rocking horse. I used to keep edging up to it so that I could stroke its brilliant arched neck and flaming nostrils, but when they asked me what I would like to do, I said uneasily, "I don't mind." But they did sometimes suggest that I should get on its back, and then there was the happiness of feeling my feet in the stirrups and making the horse rear to the tips of its rockers. When we played hide-and-seek all over the house I would fill up the moments of waiting while the others hid, by rocking. My only fear in this house was that I should be shut up and forgotten in the narrow cupboard into which I had to be lifted when we hid, in a dark spare-room. I was the only one small enough to go inside and no one ever found me.

Once Nora wanted to be naughty but she could not think how, so she asked me, but I also could not think how anyone could be naughty in that household. We were in the garden and it

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began to rain, so instead of going into the house we crept under some rhododendron bushes. The German governess called, Nora gave a little squeak in answer which could not possibly be heard, and we stayed listening to the patter of the rain on the hard leaves. But we got tired of that and went indoors. The governess scolded Nora, and asked her if she had not heard her calling. "Yes," said Nora with successful naughtiness gleaming in her eyes, "and I answered!"

In the winter they had children's dances late at night, when we drove in a closed carriage, which smelt worn-out and yet was full of excitement, up the drive, where you could only see the dim forms of the yew-trees a little darker than the sky. The house was all new with the bright colours of lights and the gay dresses of the people; it was full of warmth and the noise of talking, which felt strange after the drive in the cold darkness.

Once when they were all dancing on the shining floor, and the candle-flames against the wall were dancing too in the draught made by the whirling couples, I lifted one of the long window-curtains and stood behind it. Outside a little snow lay on the flat lawn, and the great beech-tree stood there still and bare.

VII

THE WORLD OUTSIDE

BERTRAND and I used sometimes to stay with my grandfather at a sea-side town. I was very young, but even then a black circus horse excited me so much when he pranced round the arena, now and then putting his fore-feet on the red velvet barrier, that I was on the edge of crying.

I was once lost in that town, my nurse having gone into a shop when I was some way behind, and we soon got separated by the press of people. I was suddenly terrified with the fearful feeling that I was cut off from all the world, and ran off crying, with my head down, till I found my way home by following the edge of the sea. There I sat stolidly on a bench outside the house—everybody was out—and would not move, although the people who lived next door tried to make me, till it rained fast. Then I came and stood in their window till my nurse came back in great distress. But I was quite calm then, and only regretted that she had not been able to do what she had said she

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meant to—take me on the pier and buy me some sweets.

I have faint memories of playing with strange children who admired Bertrand, one was a little blind girl who liked him to lead her about. I had to shut my eyes to see what it was like, but opened them again with relief after a few minutes. It afterwards became a great fear of mine and I used to think, when I lay in bed, that night was the only time when blind people could be happy.

I was afraid of my grandfather then, for he was deaf, and I had to be urged to go and talk to him, and I had to speak very loud, which was a fearful thing to do. He used to sit for hours in the bow-window with his big wise head covered with white hair, looking out at the sea and the distant ships. Bertrand used sometimes to stand by him and tell him the names of the ships that he knew by the colour of their funnels. This seemed to please him.

I did not see him again, but when I was a little older I suddenly began writing to him freely as if he were another child, chiefly about my animals, and drew pictures of them. When my mother was writing to him she used to ask me if I wanted to put in anything, and I used to sit down and write happily about the concerts and feasts the animals had been having. He used to send me back strange letters, asking which animal-gentleman took

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the *bâton* and who was *prima-donna*. I did not at all understand, but never thought of asking what it meant.

One evening a big brown paper parcel, came for me, and I unpacked it on the floor with growing excitement. Inside there was a horse and cart and two new fur animals from my grandfather. The cart was painted bright red and the horse was gray. My usual shyness and self-consciousness vanished, and I was noisily happy. I remember all that evening how beautiful it was to lead the horse about and stable it behind my mother's chair. One thing distressed me—the shafts were nailed to the horse. I got William to take out the nails for me. I remember him, with a frowning face, spending much trouble on it whilst I stood gravely by. Then I made some original string harness for it, and in that way doubled my pleasure.

When we heard that a menagerie was going to pass through the town we tore down the field to the road, and watched the slow procession of swaying coloured caravans drawn by sad horses clinking and shining with brass. It was fearful, but exciting, to think that the weight one could not see in those caravans was of wild animals which would kill everyone if they got loose. Sometimes a dull roar would begin to sound from inside, and I

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realized how frightened I could be. If it was a circus, there were groups of beautiful horses with long tails led behind the caravans, and many people in strange dresses.

When a menagerie was put up in a big tent on the uneven stony ground of the market place, and we went inside, where only a little light could creep through the thick grayness of the canvas walls which bulged out when people pressed against them, we saw cages of desperate and furtive-eyed animals making unknown noises. Some of the animals slept, while groups of awed people straggled round, staring at them. But it was in front of the elephants' cage that we both stopped, fascinated and quiet, watching their endless swaying from one side to the other, loving their great patient heads and wise little eyes. It was a surprise to find that they were not the clean, pale gray colour of the china elephants.

In a circus there was more noise and the people were happier. The place was strange again with banks of seats rising up to the dark roof, but there were flaring lights and the clash of a band, which excited us as well as the animals in the sawdusted space in the middle. It became my secret hope to be able to stand on one of those horses' backs, which with streaming mane and tail, flew round the arena to the wild sound of the music. Then there

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were thrilling performances on high trapezes in the roof by serious acrobats in white skins, and less charming ladies in pink frilled skirts. I hated to see the clown, and the horribly familiar way in which he treated the grave acrobats, and feared that he would come near us, in the same way that I feared that a drunken person or a lunatic would sit near us in church. Once we were taken into another tent after the performance, and saw all the circus-horses tied up there—piebald ones and small ponies; the place was thick with the hot smell of them.

There was another pleasant thing to see sometimes—troops of horse-soldiers passing through on their way to one of the big towns.

Once we waited at the side of the main road to see some hussars go by. I was then very small, and was lifted on to some railings so that I could see better. Then there came the clatter of many hoofs on the road, and the pleasant clank of metal, and the hussars went past, riding at their ease and talking. One of them called out, holding out his arms, "Let me take the baby, Miss," and it was a biting regret to me that his offer was not taken, so that I could have ridden on the horse in front of the soldier.

Some hussars stayed over the Sunday in our

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town once, and were to come to church. The prospect of that morning's service was delightful, for the officers were to sit in an empty pew just in front of us ; and the usually irritating fact that the pattern of the footstool came off on my bare knees would be as nothing with those men to look at. But when it came to the time, all the officers talked and laughed under their breath except one, but that one was not enough to save all his brothers. None of them knelt down, but they sat and bent forward, and I was dumb and puzzled that men in uniform could behave like that.

One Sunday in the summer our own red-coated volunteers came to church, and it was fine to see them swing by along the broad path with a quick rhythmical sound of feet on the ground which no ordinary man ever made. Then their band would clash out suddenly as they left the churchyard, and the music gradually became fainter as it was drowned in the air and we went up the hill.

When I first saw the sea I was too young to remember the impression it made on me, but when I was about six we stayed at a town on the Yorkshire coast. There was a gray stone quay and little harbour, where Bertrand and I used to hang about talking to the fishermen and peering into the decks of fishing boats which lay alongside.

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The stones were warm and pleasant in the sun, and everything was lazy and smelt of the sea. Or again, we used to climb on to the stone wall which ran the length of the quay, and sitting among the old men who sat there all day fishing with lines, Bertrand talked and I stared at the deep restless water.

It seemed to me so wonderful merely to see the sea that I disliked to go up the inland street to our lodgings, or to go to church where I could not see it. There were cliffs and flat sands away beyond the town where we played sometimes, and where there was a strange warm quietness, only broken by the lapping of waves over our bare feet until one of us spoke into that wide stillness. I remember that there was one dark figure miles away on the wet sand.

The stretch of sand near the town was thick with people, and the sand made loose by many footsteps, and we rarely played there; but sometimes I liked to watch a Punch and Judy show, and run away before they came round to collect money from the audience.

On the top of the cliff we walked a long way one day to a wooded ravine I hardly remember, but I recollect walking on the short pleasant turf, and feeling that I could walk for ever with the great sea always stretched out below the cliffs. Another

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time we walked more inland, and saw a green cornfield with red poppies growing at the edge of the hot white road. I had never seen a cornfield before, for we lived in a pasture country, so I picked many poppies in a fever of delight, and when we got back to our lodgings they had all miserably faded.

From the bedroom windows of our house we could see the gray station down in the valley, and the trains creeping in and out. We could sit on the window-sill and draw them, and even at that distance feel how exciting and friendly they were, so that it would have hurt us not to hear the happy noises of puffing, or the complaining repetition of the shock down a line of trucks when an engine bumped into the first one. It was still more exciting to be on the single platform—the station was the terminus of a branch-line—on summer evenings when the London train was expected, and the milk-carts came rattling up to fetch away the empty cans. Then we heard the hollow click of the signal going down, and the few people on the platform suddenly became alert. We strained our eyes to see the first white puff of smoke, and suddenly the engine came in with a rush, sizzling and dripping with heat like a great animal. Sometimes there were people in the train to be met, but apart from

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that, it was enough to stand by the great exhausted monster while Bertrand chattered to the grizzled engine-driver as he leant out of his cab. Once I stood inside while he shunted about with much noise, but I was glad to get away from the sight of the blazing fire and the heat, though afterwards I boasted of it, and also of the fact that Bertrand had been much farther.

When later the train took me with relentless rhythmical noises far away to school I loved it, and felt in a world apart from either of my two lives as I watched the smoke touch the green fields and drift away in strange shapes, blotting out the telegraph wires as they rose and fell to an endless tune. But when it brought me home again there was triumph in its rhythm and in the shrill whistle before each station.

When I first saw a Great Eastern engine, painted dark blue, standing outside St. Pancras Station, I could hardly believe it possible that engines should be so coloured, having only been used to chocolate-coloured, dull red, black and occasionally green ones. The yellow South Coast engines were another shock, but I had already heard of them, and chiefly felt a contempt for engines that looked so like toy ones.

When I was at school we often went for walks over a long tunnel through which the Scotch

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expresses of the North Western Railway ran. There were gray stone towers, blackened at the top, standing at intervals among the fields, and now and then I heard with a thrill of wonder a dim rumbling in the earth, and then a burst of smoke would puff out of the top of one of the towers, like the breath of a great dragon who had stirred in his sleep. I knew the deep cutting which led to the mouth of the tunnel. It was some way behind the home of one of the school-girls, and when I went to tea with her we used to spend all our time climbing the trees on the railway-bank which was covered with a thick mass of young oaks and chestnuts and under-growth. It was away from people's houses and quite silent till there came the tearing scream of a train, rising in note as the train came nearer and then dying away on a lower note, and then only the silent white smoke drifting among the branches of the trees was left to show that anything had passed along those bare shining rails.

Only once was there the ring of wood axes and the sound of men's voices echoing from one bank to the other. They were cutting down some trees, and it seemed strange and like some fairy-tale to hear these sounds in the silent wood.

VIII

MY BROTHERS

IN the summer holidays when Bertrand came home from school, we imagined that the whole garden was a wonderful tropical island on which we had been shipwrecked. There were long sunny days when we built huts round trees out of planks and brushwood, taken, when William was not looking, from a woodstack. We made long journeys through the jungle, hunting big game with old-fashioned ashen hockey-sticks for guns. We rode wild zebras which we broke in ourselves. Sometimes mine would bolt suddenly with me down the slope, and I felt the long grass swish against my legs. When I was not so occupied with holding in my zebra, I liked to feel the seed-heads of the grass slipping through my fingers as I ran. The dinner-bell from the house was one of the few interruptions; it meant that we had to wash off the pine-tree-black from our hands, and then eat silently and quickly, feeling so much absorbed in the life outside that the talk of grown-up people on unimportant subjects only filled us

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with a vague annoyance because it delayed us. But at last we could slip away to the garden, where I could suddenly rein up my zebra because I saw groups of black men in the tennis-ground, and a native village in the long grass near the road below.

Once it was Bertrand's turn to go out hunting while I kept watch at our huts. After some time I heard a faint call for help, and went to find him. I found him lying in the long grass apparently dead. I tried to rouse him, at first gently and then with much energy, pulling both his arms; but he was still lifeless as a fish. I called: "Do get up, Bertrand, I mean out of the game. You can't be dead." For if he were dead the game would be ended. Visitors were seen across the lawn, and Bertrand got up with no more trouble and walked across to them smiling, and I went with him, glowering and silent, for now the game was really ended.

When we had grown too old for this game we played golf with the same hockey-stick-guns and tennis balls. Some real golf players saw us over the hedge and threw us some chipped golf balls, which improved the game. Part of the course lay through a field of mowing grass, where it was hard to see the balls. The owner of the field found us there once and chased us off. We ran like rabbits

MY BROTHERS

and scrambled over the gate into our field, where we lay panting and safe in the rough grass.

Sometimes when my brothers were playing tennis, and I was fetching the balls which hid themselves under the trees or in the grass with a sudden vicious spurt, like a shot, William would pass wheeling his wheel-barrow. There would be cries of "Come and play, William!" but William shook his head and went on. Dick would then seize him, and pull him towards the tennis-court in spite of his struggles, and calling out, "Lemme go, Master Dick! I mun work—I ha' no time for playing o' thirty-forty wi' them as don't work." But in order to get away he would pick up a tennis-racquet in his strong left hand, and when a ball was sent to him he would hit it whizzing up into the air, to such a height that while we were all staring up at it he would run off back to his wheel-barrow.

Dick was once turning his fowls from one house to another, and as I stood by he said, "Catch hold!" and gave me a fierce hen to hold upside down by her legs. He told me she could not possibly peck me if I held her firmly, and I believed him, but I wished the time would come when he would take those hard dry legs out of my hands; for though she was still, and her wings hung down lifelessly, I knew her round and brilliant eyes were awake.

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Dick took her away after what seemed to me a long while, and the hen and I were both relieved.

On still autumn days, when the grass was wet with dew in the morning, and the sun hot after the white mist had shrunk away, coming idly out of the house I would sometimes see pale smoke hanging over the kitchen-garden. I ran up to a space near some pine trees from where the smoke came rolling, where William had got a weed-bonfire. It was smouldering so gently that I could jump on it, and the only result was the heavy smell of smoke which hung about me. I could make it more alive by poking it with a stick, when it crackled uneasily like a sleeping animal.

Dick once called me down to the bottom of the garden to see a more lively one of his own. It was made of some rubbish, and as he pitched more stuff on its hungry top, I made a hole with a stick in its heart, and saw the glowing redness inside and felt its hot breath; and then the crackling became quicker, like laughter, as some dry bits fell into the hole. I stood about for a long time, happily pulling charred bits of stick from the inside and throwing them on the top. At last we went up the garden to tea, and the air was chill now with the damp smell of dying leaves, and we left the smoke still slowly blowing out behind us.

MY BROTHERS

Sometimes I woke up on a winter's morning to find the room filled with a new white light, shining with an unusual coldness on the ceiling, and I knew it meant snow. Out of the window there was a new earth, the hills now lying white against a darker sky, and the old tree-stumps on the gravel walk shapeless with great rounded caps of snow; even the thin iron railings were sunk in a drifted sea. Once I remember walking through two solid walls of snow as if it had been in a dream. To see the footprints of birds lightly marked on the whiteness was a wonderful thing, and so it was to be able to know where they had moved when no one was seeing them.

The snow lay long on those cold hills, and when it was hard enough it meant tobogganning. Bertrand and I would tramp through the fresh white yard to the wood-sheds, earth-smelling and dark and quite familiar. We dragged our toboggans down from where they lived among boxes all the summer, and pulled them round to the field-gate in the garden. I remember the pleasure of seeing the tracks of the runners and my foot-prints where no man had ever walked before. The sight and fresh smell of it would suddenly make me excited. I would jerk the toboggan's rope so that it seemed to give a sudden leap of excitement.

In order to reach one of the best hills we had

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to walk through many sloping fields. It was a long sweep going steeply down, and then melting into a flat white desert near the brook, now dark and still with ice. The swift rush down the hill, the brisk sound of the runners as they slid over the snow which blew in spurts against my face cutting it, was soon over, and when I slowed down on the plain I sat still on my toboggan, the fields stretching all round me, broken by a gray stone wall on the left.

There were other places—the field next to the garden, which ended in a sudden hill, curving up again to a cart-track like a switchback. My elder brothers called it “Plevna,” and I thought the entrance to Hell was under that hill, a Hell of dark and lofty halls lit by blue flames with altars down the centre, on which were burning souls, described to me by Judith. But this made no difference to its being a good tobogganning place.

One late afternoon I was tugging up this field on the way home, when, in a space between two tall hedges, I saw the red sun very clear and still above a distant hedge. I had never seen it so red before, because the hills hid the sunset. Then it dropped behind the dark hedge, and I went home trailing behind the others.

In the garden was another place. We began on what was generally a lawn near the drive, but

MY BROTHERS

was now blotted into everything else by one stretch of thick snow. The toboggan slipped along slowly at first ; sometimes it stopped and had to be urged on, but that gave one more time to think of the pleasure that was coming. Then it came—a swift rush down a steep rough bank which sent one flying down the slope, till one either dropped off a little bank on to the tennis ground, with the toboggan on one's back, or slithered under a pine tree at the corner, where the brown needles on the ground were untouched by snow, and the smell of the living tree was strong. It kept me there still and waiting for a few moments before I answered Bertrand's cheerful shouts from above and tugged up the hill again.

In the winter holidays, when we could not be out so much, Bertrand and I used to give each other entertainments in our nursery. One day I would get an invitation from Bertrand's chicken, Ibsen, asking me and all my family of animals to come to see a play acted. Then in the evening we would sit in the dark before a mysterious arrangement on the top of the nursery table, made of a towel-rail hung all over with my sashes and coloured handkerchiefs. A bell would ring, and one of the handkerchiefs was taken away to show the theatre,—a cardboard box which originally held shirts, turned on its side with the scenery inside brilliantly lit up by

A CHILDHOOD

stolen candle-ends. Bertrand's plays were generally adapted fairy-tales, with card-board figures cut out and painted, and lyrics invented by him, which I believe now were really funny, but I thought them all serious at the time.

When it was my turn, I acted one of Shakespeare's plays that I had seen at school, with my fur animals in paper ruffs and with silver paper swords and cloaks to look like Elizabethans. I went through it all quite solemnly, and could not understand why my mother and Bertrand should find it amusing, and laugh helplessly when a rather clumsy rabbit as Rosalind was made love to by a squirrel. The scenery, a wood, I had painted with delight and thought very good. It gave me great happiness that Bertrand was surprised at the sight of it, for that might mean much.

Sometimes one of us would whisper after dining-room tea, "Come upstairs, we'll have a feast to-night," and then we would go into the lamp-lit nursery and shut out the dark passage which was full of terrors, and arrange bits of fruit and sweets in doll's china dishes and spread them on a box covered with clean handkerchiefs.

At other times there were tableaux of battles in foreign lands, or reviews of all our soldiers, and at Christmas time the nursery was full of the exhilarating smell of a fir-tree. We took days

MY BROTHERS

getting it ready to amuse the grown-up people. It looked beautiful, I thought, when the coloured candles were lit, which I thought burnt with a quite different flame to the ordinary white ones. I went back to the nursery once when everything was over, and the tree was mysteriously dark and still in the corner, and only the firelight was making leaping shadows on the ceiling. The smell of a blown-out candle in my bedroom always reminded me of this and gave me pleasure.

We cared little for parties. When there were many children I was frightened, and I hated not being very good at their games. When there were fewer people, and one could hide freely in strange dark places in a house that was not full of evil spirits, that was good.

I was having tea at a children's party once and eating bread and butter, and saw in front of me some attractive biscuits shaped like dominoes with the numbers in chocolate on them. My plate was empty when I was asked what I would have, but my mouth was too full to speak, and the chance was gone.

As we came home I said furiously to Judith, "Why *will* Mrs. Read ask me what I'll have when my mouth is full?" and Judith answered, "Your mouth should never be full." I knew she was right, but was still more angry because I could make no answer to that.

IX

OTHER PEOPLE

FOR a year I went over a hill every morning to do lessons with another child, and stayed for the day at a cold gray house on the edge of a mysterious wood, which stretched its long fingers round the house on each side but did not quite touch it. I did not think any one could have dared to press into the middle of that thick wood; I only dared to walk along a path that crept up-hill among the trees, where I could see the sky and fields between the trunks, and where we knew we should find white bluebells with brittle stems to be snapped.

Where the wood left off and the rough grass began we used to play with a swing under a young oak tree. It was a single rope with a wooden cross-bar, on which we sat astride in turn. We used to pull it up the hill behind the trunk, and then make it swing out with a swoop like a bird, till the swinger's feet could touch the twigs high above the head of the other one on the ground. There was a long series of swings we had invented, and one of us

OTHER PEOPLE

went through it all while the other waited. I used to lie in the sun on the warm sandy slope, waiting ; or cut bracken stems to see King Charles's oak in the brown woody centre, or make plans of a country in the loose sand. All the swings had strange names we had thought of, but we could not find one good enough for the best of all. One morning I had just come, and was importantly unslinging my satchel ready for lessons, when Catherine ran to me excitedly, calling out, "I have found a name for that swing, it is 'Ne plus ultra' ; I found it on Miss Baker's button-box ; I asked her what it meant, and she said, 'None better.'"

It is the late spring I best remember there, when we went for walks along a road whose banks were filled with wild flowers, and woods of pine stretched above them and the river lay among the fields below. We rode Catherine's pony by turns ; the governess was left far behind, and I remember running by him while he trotted, or walking alongside with my hand on his warm black shoulder, and my eyes searching for flowers growing on the bank. We made strange collections of double-headed dandelions which we found along this road, and pressed them with great care. I have never seen one since, but we found them then on nearly every walk. We used to press wild garlic leaves too, because they became so thin and flat.

A CHILDHOOD

On wet dark evenings we used to play one endless game, chasing each other along cold echoing corridors, up one staircase and down another; it hardly ever ended by one of us catching the other before I was called for and had reluctantly to go home. There were shutters on the bedroom windows, and once I saw some fastened before I went; a sudden feeling seized me that I could not have slept in that room of terror. All the upper part of the house filled me with dread of what it would be at night; but I never spoke of this dread.

When I was eleven years old my mother and I were going to stay for a few days with some elderly cousins in Hastings. My mother was then coming home, but there was some doubtful mystery about me. There was a mysterious doctor to be seen there, and I gathered that there was a possibility that I should have to stay behind. I asked Maria, but no one could make my painful uncertainty clearer. Then one day a new red dressing-gown and gray bedroom slippers came for me by post, and though I admired them, it made me quite certain that I was going away for more than a few days.

When we came on a dark autumn evening to my cousins' strange house, with its bright lights, and carpets so thick that you could not hear anybody's footsteps, and its many looking-glasses

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about the rooms, and the big solemn people, I sat on my box in the room that my mother and I were to have, and cried hopelessly.

But it was no longer so bad when I found a big cat called Miaow to stroke. He lived next door, but with what I thought was extraordinary intelligence, he came into my cousins' house whenever there was fish for dinner. He would walk out of the room with great dignity after the fish, his tail high and gracefully waving at the tip. He came up to call us every morning, crept under the eider-down and lay there purring, his paws rhythmically kneading the blanket.

One evening our cousins had gone out, and when my mother and I went in to dinner, on one of the empty chairs drawn up to the table was Miaow, seated like a guest and gazing with wise dignity at the table-cloth. He was received with delight, and I sat opposite him in a state of rapt happiness till he vanished after the fish. Then there was great joy in describing to other people his cleverness in knowing that though our cousins would have turned him off the chair, we would not.

I was left behind in a boarding-house, partly under the rule of a doctor, where there were many children and some bigger girls, and the life was that of a school. There was almost no liberty, and the sudden

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nearness of many human beings, instead of the freedom and spaces of a garden full of trees, hurt me.

Later in the morning my mother, who had stayed another night with our cousins, came to see me. In the daylight I thought it queer and interesting to stay alone, and told her I did not mind it a bit, but when I saw her little figure growing smaller and smaller as it went down the road there was a bitter feeling of loneliness. It was, I think, that evening that I crept up to the empty dark bedroom, where there was only the glimmer of low-turned gas from a bracket, and lay despairingly crying on the red cotton quilt. I thought of writing home, and then quite suddenly I felt how big the world was, and that it could not be moved by me, and that I had better be quiet. I remember going down again to the long bare room, lit with gas, where we lived. Its floor was covered with oilcloth and it was full of a stuffy evening smell, and groups of girls reading or sewing, and all quite intent on their own bits of life.

The boarding-house was kept by a Mrs. Smith and her elderly sister. They were both soaked with evangelical religion: the prayers in the morning were long and intense, and I went about the house feeling that if I confessed any sin these people would be ready to forgive it.

Mrs. Smith stooped slightly, she had dark gray

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hair, and a face, not very thin, but set in folds of great misery. The eyes looked dark and bright in her pale face when she lifted them, but they mostly looked on the ground. I have seen her very rarely lift up her eyes and smile, and when she did the whole face shone, but it quickly returned to its misery and pain.

The younger sister—Miss Mary—was bigger, with hair nearly white, her head serenely held up as if she hardly knew where her feet were going. The face had the quite happy and not very intelligent expression of some kindly old clergymen.

As far as I knew they managed well, but the children were mostly not strong enough to be turbulent. There was one child who habitually lied and cheated. The first night I was there she stamped into the sitting-room with her withered leg in its metal splint, and asked in a rasping voice if anyone would play 'Halma' with her. No one replied, so I shyly offered to, and we played. I was too shy to object to the quite barefaced way in which she cheated. Naturally she won. She used to have frequent interviews with one of the sisters and come away with a tearful voice and red eyes. She used to play with us other children, running round the table on her odd legs faster than those with ordinary ones, and filling us with some fear of her abnormality. When she left, her

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people wrote gratefully to say how much she had improved morally.

Once the cousins with whom I had been staying took me out to a pantomime in the town. I had never been in a theatre before, and the crowded noisy half-darkness before the curtain went up was exciting. But the play itself—it was Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp, and I knew the story—hurt and puzzled me. I could not understand why Aladdin's mother should be acted by a man with big feet, who made jokes in a loud voice, and Aladdin himself should be a girl with long hair and fat legs and high-heeled shoes. I also disliked the thwacking and sausage-throwing in the Harlequinade which followed, and at which everyone laughed. But the dances of chorus-fairies were lovely and I wanted to join them. When we reached home after driving along the dark streets, where the gas-lights shone in the puddles, I said I had enjoyed myself very much.

The house was on the main road to London, and we went for most of our walks along that road. It is a wide coaching road with occasional villas and then big straight trees. Once one of the children ran forward into the arms of a man, her father. I do not know how he came there, but ever after on that road I had a hope that I might meet some one walking towards me, but it was never fulfilled.

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There was a St. Bernard dog in the house called Gerda, calm and good-tempered but not very friendly. I found it difficult to eat all the meat that was given me at dinner. Gerda, on the look-out for crumbs, used to come shambling round the long table, then the clicking sound of her toe-nails dragging on the oil-cloth stopped suddenly by my chair and I hurriedly dropped bits of cold meat for her, with a sickening fear in my heart that her quietness would be noticed.

For some time I slept in a bedroom where there was no other child—only old Miss Mary who slept in a bigger bed behind a screen. A small glimmer of the gas flame was burning in the room when I came to bed, and I had to climb on my bed and turn it full on. I was unused to gas and was so nervous that I frequently turned it out by the shaking of my fingers, even when I remembered the right way to turn it. This meant calling for Miss Steer to come and light it again. Miss Steer was a big, dark, bony-nosed housekeeper with a high colour and black curls. She heard the smaller children say their prayers in a little stuffy room, and I always seemed to be breaking into the middle of a prayer when I went to ask her to light the gas. Then she used to scold me slightly and laugh at me jovially for my stupidity. It became a terror which I had to go through every night.

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I was not often asleep when Miss Mary came to bed, but I did not speak to her ; and if she spoke to me I pretended to be sleepier than I was. One night I was aware she was looking at me as she did her hair, but I made no sign. Then I must have really dozed, for the next thing I remember was hearing two voices behind the screen, and then Miss Mary crying miserably—the hopeless crying of a quite old person, and Mrs. Smith trying to make her quieter and speaking to her caressingly. In a state of fear that I should hear what they said, and yet not daring to call out that I was awake, I stuffed my fingers into my ears. When the crying seemed less, and I took my fingers out to quiet my dazed head, I heard Mrs. Smith say, “Do you think Joan is awake?” And Miss Mary’s reply in a clear voice, “Oh no, she would tell us if she were.” And I still said nothing, but stuffed up my ears again. Then everything became quieter and Mrs. Smith went out of the room, and I needed no longer to stuff up my ears. Miss Mary came over to the dressing-table and turned to me with the gas-light full on her face. It was now quite peaceful. I pretended just to wake up, and she spoke to me asking if I had been asleep, and I said I had.

I had never realized that grown-up people had any painful emotions ; I thought only children

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cried to go home or because they were hurt. And next morning how strange and rather terrible it was to see Mrs. Smith and Miss Mary going about peacefully as usual, and yet to know that that night had really happened. I never knew why they were unhappy. The fear that I ought to have spoken has burnt me for years.

Every morning Mrs. Smith's daughter used to go round the long breakfast-table, ladling out powdered sugar on to each child's porridge. I used to listen in fear, as the dull sound of her carpet slippers came nearer, to prevent her quickly from scattering sugar on mine. Her dry face, with the frown that was always creased on her forehead, used to frighten me. The first day I was there she asked me with kindness to come and see her canaries, a big twittering cage-full. It seemed strange to me that these birds should scrape their bills and chirp just in the same way as my own birds. After that I remember no other kindness or unkindness, but I was in a frequent terror of making her angry.

There was another daughter, who I was told had been very ill and had heart-disease, and might die at any moment. I remember the astonishment with which I used to look at her big and rather lively pale face, and the rough dark hair, just growing after her illness, and wonder that she

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could be so near death. She had the kind of good nature which Agnes did not seem to have. She, too, thudded about in carpet slippers.

There was also a mysterious Miss Marks. The younger children told me how she used to teach them kindergarten lessons ; but now she was ill in bed and no one saw her. But one Sunday afternoon I was taken up to her room to do Bible picture-puzzles, and play with a small child staying in the house whom she wanted to see. The air in the room was heavy with illness, and it was with a dumb horror that I saw the pale sick face, the bright eyes full of life, and the long strands of dark hair lying on the pillow. It was a relief when the doctor came and I could shut the door behind me, and rush freely down the stairs.

When I first went to school I boarded out with another child, and we walked every day to our lessons along wide new roads, with lines of young trees at the edges of the foot-paths, and red houses behind the wooden palings with strange names to them. I used to look eagerly through the openings made by their drives to see what kind of lives went on behind the walls. Once a side-gate was open which led into a bit of field near one of the houses, and inside I saw some cochin-china fowls strolling about, and that showed me that human people

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like ourselves must live there. I used to hope that the gate would be left open again when I passed.

When the horse-chestnuts fell from the trees we picked up as many as our pockets would hold and took them to school. Then in the middle of a dull lesson I could open my desk a crack and see a shining brown chestnut, which had been chosen from my collection, lying happily there. We used to make them have obstacle races with each other, and arrange them in families, when we got back to the half-underground room at the back of the little town house where we hurried over our home lessons. Sometimes our games made us noisy, and then a door would open at the top of the stairs and a hard voice would call to us to go on with our lessons and be quiet, and we would be still as frightened mice.

From this room we could only see the end of the strip of lawn above us, yet it was always pleasant to come down to this gloomy little place from the meals upstairs where I felt a foreigner with grown-up people, whom I disliked. But the happiest times were the walks to school on the bright autumn mornings, kicking the fallen leaves and looking for chestnuts. There were white anemones out in one dewy garden that we passed, and I liked the lessons too in the big cheerful school.

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Sometimes I stopped there for the afternoon, and then I walked back alone in the growing dusk. On Sundays, even our downstairs room was an unhappy place, for we had to sit and learn pages of a strange long Catechism, and when that was over nothing more amusing was allowed than writing letters or reading serious books. It was a relief when there appeared a lively kitten, which made no difference in its observance of Sunday. My hands used to be covered with scratches from playing with this kitten, which kept its lively character untouched by the people in the house. But the fox-terrier which lived there had become a little like them and was stiff and unfriendly. He went for walks with us on Saturdays in a never-changing way, running along a little way apart from us and quite absorbed in himself, whilst the kitten would suddenly pounce on one of the servant's backs when she was kneeling down at family prayers, and I had to bite my tongue to prevent a burst of giggles. Once a psalm was read at these prayers: "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of ungodliness"; and I thought that that must be true, for I would rather be a door-keeper at church than live in this house.

I had brought some stuffed animals with me, but I was careful that no one should know anything

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about them. They lived in my empty travelling box under my bed, and every night I brought them out, and in the morning I put them back. But one morning a cat was left in the bed-clothes; the housemaid found it and told me, and I, growing red and uncomfortable, tried to make some explanation, but she was friendly and kept my secret.

She took us for a long walk one Saturday, away beyond the suburbs of the town to a lane shut in by hedges, where we picked blackberries, and laughed and screamed without being scolded because it was not lady-like to make a noise near other people's houses. Suddenly I saw the white gates of a level-crossing at the end of the lane, and I ran and sat on the top of the gate, and in spite of the housemaid's begging me to come away, waited for a train to go past. Then there came the well-known thunder, and the huge black monster rushed past, and I smelt the hot smoky breath of a friend, and it reminded me of, and was somehow connected with, all the pleasant life at home. Then as we went back I felt above them all, with that taste of happiness in my mouth.

One Sunday night we were allowed to go to church—a more exciting place in the evening, when the gas-lights were flaring and bent to the draught from the open doors, than in the morning

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when it was darker than outside. It was cold, and we both had to have shawls round our necks. I had mine on, and was waiting on the path outside in the dark till Janet came out. As she stood on the steps with her mother, the gas-light showing through the open door behind them, I heard her voice raised peevishly, "I don't want that ugly black shawl!" There were some threatening words from the mother, and a peevish answer, and then a sudden thwack on Janet's ear, and a whining sound as she came quickly down the steps with the black shawl on. The world seemed black and bad to me then, and my face grew hot as I stood in the coldness. As we walked on, Janet and her sister talked cheerfully, and I wondered how it was possible. When we came back to a chill supper the only person who was silent and constrained was myself.

After that winter I went to live in the big school house. At first I was alone, and had a table of my own in the dining-room where I did my preparation, and on it there was a pot of tulips, of which I made careful pencil-studies in a drawing-book as they grew. Later many other girls came, and there was a new and lively life, which nearly hid my old life of the garden.

In the mornings a big room was filled by every

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one in the school while prayers were read, then the girls marched past me to the tune of a march, and put their hymn books on a pile which I held ; the mistresses followed, making their steps fall out of time to show that they were something higher than schoolgirls. Then when they were all gone, and the girl at the piano had scuttled upstairs, the room was left quiet, with the sunlight streaming across the bare floor and the dishevelled chairs.

It was pleasant to come back at the beginning of the summer term, and find that the sticky buds of the chestnuts had burst, and new ribbed leaves thick with white wool had been unpacked, and the little poplars which lined the suburban roads where the sun lay warm on the dust were showing their pale green leaves.

It was exciting at first to meet all the other girls, and to arrange one's books, and to discover the reddish honesty flowers which were out in the bits of border that had not been eaten up by the playground.

We sometimes went for a walk to the side of a canal. It lay still and very dark as it passed through two great parks, and was quite unlike the clear, living, sounding river I knew, but yet with a strange attraction ; rather fearful too from its invisible depth, and the deadly way one could imagine oneself being drowned in it. On the left the broad

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tow-path was shadowed by the low branches of horse-chestnut trees, which dropped their big leaves and chestnuts into the dark water. This led to the lock, which was a place I wished to linger at for hours. I do not know how it was that chances of waiting and seeing the barges go through could so often happen in a school walk. One of the fierce-looking girls from a barge would run on first to get the lock ready. She would close the lower gates, and with a rattle of bolts would open the sluices and the water would pour into the nearly empty lock, so that the water-level slowly crept up, licking the sides. Then the girl would set her back against half of the heavy wooden gate, and with her body bent and slow steps backwards she would force it open. The horse with the tow-rope would come slowly on and stop beyond the lock, so that the rope lay slack on the water. Then the barge itself would glide in through the half-gate and lie gently against the side, and strong men would get out to help. There were often women and babies there. I remember staring at it all and saying nothing, and they hardly seemed to see me with their unfriendly eyes. They all helped to shut the great gate, and then the sluices of the lower gate were opened and there was a great noise and foaming, and the force of the water which was suddenly let out of the lock made the still canal water of the lower reach flow

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away in angry ripples. It was difficult to decide which was the best to do, to stand below and see the water gush out, or to watch by the side of the lock while the barge slipped gently down, and the water lapped against the gloomy stone walls and left them dripping. At the end the lower gate was opened, the horse would walk on easily until it was brought to its usual slow pace by the dripping rope being pulled taut. Then they quietly went away under the further trees.

Away from the lock on the higher level the canal passed close to a tall grove of beech trees, and here it grew very wide for a space, and on the far side I remember the water looked quite black and of a deepness unknown, and covered thickly with tawny beech-leaves. I could not think of anything more horrible than to be helpless in this water. Then there was a sharp turn and the canal lay among the pleasant grass-land of the higher park. Here, on summer days, everything seemed so curiously old, as if it had all been there for hundreds of years and looked just the same in the sun, the gray stone bridge and the full-foliaged trees. In places where the ground lay lower than the canal we used to find pink ragged robins.

One summer afternoon we went beyond the canal, where a slow little river lay in a thick wood, and the ground was wet with grasses and bog-

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plants. Snakes might have lain there, and strange plants might be found there, and a sudden wildness came on me as I plunged into bogs and pressed through thickets and had no care for scratches on my hands. I could no longer speak to my school-fellows. Someone found yellow irises there. I had never seen them before, and they seemed to me the most beautiful flowers. We were all tired when we came home; but the astonishing beauty of those irises in the school dining-room remained.

I remember a certain wood in the autumn, when the white mist lay among the distant trees, brilliantly coloured fungi growing on old bits of wood, and the roots from great trees standing out like bones across the path. In one place there were tall Spanish chestnut trees. We used to pick up the nuts to roast by the school fires. Some chestnut leaves would quietly flicker down, and if I lingered behind my schoolfellows there was no other sound.

Once afterwards some lines from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* were read to us in a school class :

Calm is the morn without a sound,
Calm as to suit a calmer grief,
And only through the faded leaf
The chestnut pattering to the ground.

This suddenly made more real what I had seen that day.

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Once we were lost in that wood, and there was always a hope that it might happen again. In the summer there was a thick patch of scented syringa in the hedge near, and at night in the dormitory, when it was too hot to sleep, I kept smelling the sweet heaviness of it from the bits in our water-jugs.

On some Saturday nights in the summer people who had big gardens near the town used to have a band playing, and all the paths lit up dimly by many-coloured lights, and the townspeople came in and strolled about or danced on the lawn. A party of us used to go from the school-house. We got excited by the music in the dusk and danced wildly with each other on the grass, which did not answer to one's feet as the floor of a room did ; but it was wonderful to have the sky over one's head and the dark trees, living their own mysterious lives, standing round. A breeze would suddenly stir the leaves, now of that strange colour like everything else, and then die away. We had to go back to bed long before the end. But lying awake in the dormitory I heard the faint sounds of "God save the Queen" coming lightly through the open window. I stood upon my bed, partly for the pleasure of being able to answer righteously, "I had to stand up when I heard 'God save the Queen,'" when I was angrily told to lie down.

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There were no longer terrors at night in a dormitory full of people, and I could creep to the window on warm moonlight nights and sit on a clothes-basket, looking over the strips of villa gardens, dignified now in the stillness. Once another girl saw me, and stole to the window to see what I was looking at, but I whispered, "Nothing," and we waltzed together back to our beds on quiet bare feet so as not to wake the others.

I stayed in London for a few days one November in the middle of a school term. One evening the blue dusk had crept on, and the streets were lit with bluish and yellow lamps. We were coming home from some show, and climbed on to the top of an omnibus. Then I saw the great stretch of dark houses like the rocks in a sea, and the wide sky and the spits of light and heard the sounds of many people and the clatter of horses and cart-wheels, and a sudden fear came to me that it was impossible for one God to know the lives of all these people.

One great puzzle that was often jumping up in my thoughts and worrying me was that I could not find out if anything existed when I could no longer see it.

I hated to think that when I was away at school, my home vanished until I came back and gave it

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life again ; for when I was away I wanted to shut my eyes and see the blades of grass in the field still growing, and feel my feet on the slippery brown pine-needles under the trees, and everything going on as if I were really there. Before that, I remember climbing on to the red railings and watching the train creeping away in the valley, panting out puffs of white smoke as it got up steam for its journey. Then it would disappear like a snake round the bend, and I would strain my eyes to keep it alive as long as possible.

I used to come home for my holidays from school. When the train was still miles away from home I thought I could feel its nearness, as I stood with my head out of the window and felt the cold air rush past. Then came the same sleepy station, and William, and the gray bridge, and the lime tree on the field-path, and the pleasant windows of my room, and I suddenly realized that it was only I who was excited ; the place and the people were quite unmoved.

Sometimes on summer mornings in the holidays, when the sun had yet only touched the tree-tops, I went in the fields to look for mushrooms. Then suddenly pushing through the wet grass I would see the white roundness of one and others near it. They looked astonishingly holy, and were

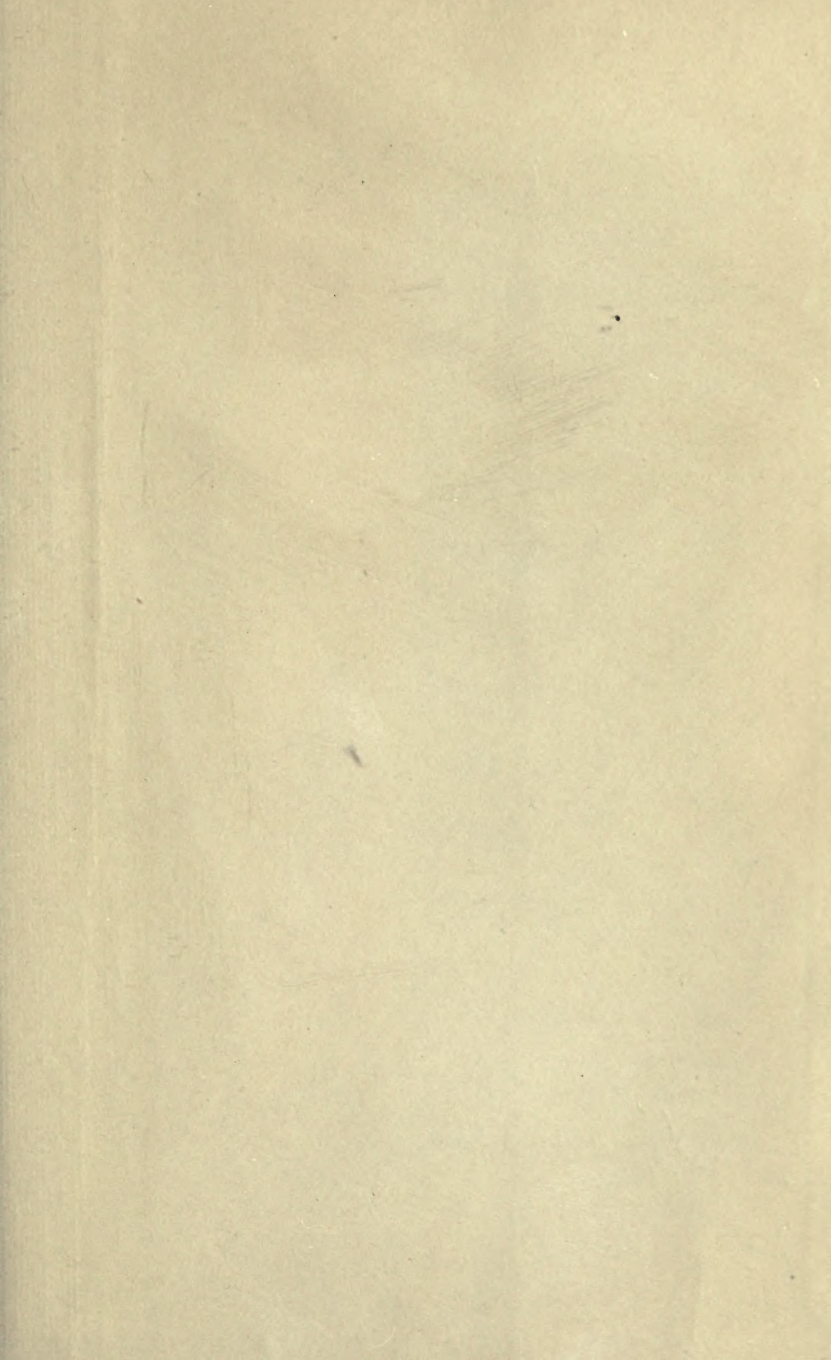
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warm with life and wet with drops of dew on them, and when I touched my face with them they were tender, and the smell of their growing was strong. But when the sun shone hot on the grass and dried it I found no more and went home.

But these fields and this garden had to be left. The day before, a sunny September day, I went alone before breakfast when all was still and the fields were gray with dew, down to the brook. But I was distracted and self-conscious, and came back quickly through the fresh fields.

That evening I lay on my face in the grass of the top field, with the horses munching steadily round me. I stayed there till it grew chill with the evening dampness, and then I climbed the fence and ran through the friendly wood to the dark house.

The next day there was a bitter rain as I went down the hill. A sister who was with me looked back. I felt somehow annoyed, because I thought I was expected to look back too, and though I looked, what did it matter?



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